

breakfast ready prepared for them when they return from their morning's walk, and are ready to set to with healthy appetites. This question of Sybaritism is a chief source of dispute between the rival sects of Mahā and Sula-gandi.

Breakfast done, they wash out the begging-bowls, and chant a few lauds before the image of the Buddha, meditating for a short time on kindness and affection. During the succeeding hour the scholars are allowed to play about, but must not make a noise, or indulge in quarrelsome games; the religious pass the time in leisurely conversation, or in any other way they please; the kyaung po-go usually has visits from old people, who come to pay their respects, or perhaps the kyaung-tagā, the founder of the monastery, the patron of his benefice, comes to consult with him on various matters, or to converse about religion and good works. The etiquette observed on these occasions is always very stately and ceremonious. Whoever approaches, whether it be the poorest villager, the founder of the monastery, or the governor of the district, all alike must prostrate themselves three times before the yahan, and, with uplifted hands, say, "In order that all the sins I have committed, in thought, in word, or in deed, may be pardoned to me, I prostrate myself three times, once in honour of the Buddha, again in honour of the Law, and thirdly in honour of the Assembly, the three precious things. By so doing, I hope to be preserved from the three calamities, from the four states of punishment; and from the five enemies, fire, water, thieves, governors (literally translated burdens), and malevolent people." The sayā replies: "As a reward for his merit and his obeisances, may the supporter (tagā) be freed from the three calamities, the four states of punishment, the five enemies, and from harm of what kind soever. May all his aims be good and end well; may he advance firmly in the noble path, perfect himself in wisdom, and finally obtain rest in ne'ban." Whenever the visitor addresses the yahan he joins his hands together, and sitting as he does on a mat, slightly bends the body forward, applying the title of payā, or lord, and making use of the honorific forms of speech specially reserved for the religious. The mendicant on his part calls the layman, of whatever

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Brahmin priests were originally brought captives from Manipur, and have been employed as astrologers ever since, their ranks being occasionally recruited by new arrivals. One of the requests preferred to Colonel Symes on his embassy to Ava in 1796 was that he would persuade the Governor-General to send a learned Brahmin and his wife to the capital. The race has been maintained tolerably pure, and the Põnna is readily distinguishable in the streets from the pōngyi. The astrologers muster naturally in greatest force in Mandalay, and their monastery there is situated in a magnificent grove of trees south of the town, and close to the cemeteries. Unlike the native religious, they do not raise their houses on posts above the ground, but follow the Indian custom of having the mat-covered earth for their floor. Foreigners are not admitted into their temples, but there is no objection to the images being brought out by a Põnna for exhibition to his friends. They worship Krishna and twenty-five other deities, but have all but no congregation, few of their faith coming to Mandalay, and those laymen who were carried away at the same time as themselves into captivity having turned to the Buddhist faith.

No yahan is allowed to have a separate monastery built for him until he has spent five full Wā under the discipline of a prior. These Lents must also be consecutive. According to their seniority in this respect the monks obtain names. Thus a pyin-sin who has spent five years—which of course is implied by the Wā—is called Anuti, and is a fit object for the pious to honour by erecting a special kyaung for him. When he has been ten years in the order he is addressed as Myizza-ti, and those who have remained steadfastly for twenty years, attain to the full honour of Mahā-ti. Such a self-denying man is always sure of a magnificent funeral when he dies.

It is a very good point about the life in the monastery that the great austerities and absurd mortifications of the flesh indulged in by the Brahminical houses find no place with the Buddhists, who reject them as unnecessary and unprofitable. The life of the initiated is one of constant self-denial; all superfluities and luxuries are renounced; all that is calculated to excite the passions is forbidden; but there

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771 life of the European nations the manifold character of the questions of the day attract and occupy the minds and influence the religious beliefs of the people, the eyes of the Burman Buddhist are uninterruptedly fixed on the dark mysteries which surround his beginning, his end, and every moment of his existence. His religion enters into every action of his life, and its admirable system of morality need fear comparison with none other on earth; while everything else appears but as a matter of detail, or a different method of viewing the same things. He is not at all unwilling to enter into discussion as to what is the true religion: whether only one is the right, whether all have sprung from the same root and have only now assumed different forms, or whether, as the Deity gave to the hand different fingers, so He has given to mankind different paths. But the arguments of the proselytiser have but very little success, while, on the other hand, there is nowadays practically no attempt to gain converts to their own national faith. This is no doubt in great part due to the absence of all ministerial duties in the brethren of the yellow robe, but also to a belief that true faith can only grow up gradually, and cannot be forced on the mind. At the same time there is not a hint of bigotry. In Mandalay all forms of religion were allowed to be carried on without the least semblance of opposition. The solemn call of the muezzin; the tinkling of the convent-bell, under the cross of Rome; the noisy rites of devil and fire-worshippers; even the ceremonies of the former fierce enemies of Buddhism, the Brahmins—all of these were exercised without the least hindrance, and the processions of the various forms of faith passed one another in the street with the most complete amicability. Even a convert is left unharmed. There may be a sense of wonder and contempt for the man who voluntarily resigns his high hopes as a Buddhist for the probable fallacies of another cult, but there is never any real attempt at oppression.

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795 Heresies, therefore, never originate with the people; any there are come from the monasteries, but even these relate more to matters of discipline and internal regulation than to real points of faith. The yahans are very clever in dispute, and are far from being averse to it. The better educated of

them know their ground perfectly well, and are quite able to take full advantage of the strong points of their position. They rely entirely on the holy books, and these they have at their fingers' ends. It is granted by all that they are, almost without exception, entirely free from intolerance, and are quite unable to comprehend the zeal for conversion. A venerable Sadaw in Bhamo came and listened attentively to a Burmese sermon of Dr. Mason, the celebrated American missionary. When it was over he came and complimented him on its depth and grasp, and then suggested that the reverend doctor should go with him to offer up worship before the image of Buddha! The monks do not think, with cynical mockery, that every one should be allowed to go his own way and be blessed after his own fashion; on the contrary, they seek zealously for new truths and explanations of mysteries; but they hold it presumptuous and unwarrantable, in view of the dark secrets which envelop the life of man from its dawning to its close, to set up each his individual opinion with dogmatic certainty as the only true form and the only one that can save. They take their standpoint on the actual state of things, on the misery and sorrow which is externally bound up with the nature of the human body as it exists. They devote themselves entirely to preparing the spirit for its delivery, when it will finally rest, raised above every fear of new change, in the harmonious equipoise of Ne'ban. For this last and highest aim no hypotheses have to be assumed. They require no personal deity who would demand a special place in the system of the world, and in a possible danger to the cosmic system might incur the same risk of destruction. They remain entirely within the clearly defined horizon of their limit of vision, and are therefore very difficult to attack in argument.

Nevertheless schisms have arisen from time to time, and exist at the present day, but they have sprung more from revolt against excessive austerity, or corresponding laxity, than from any real difference on doctrinal points. The Lord Buddha had hardly died before one of the most aged of the disciples, Subhadra, thus addressed the assembled brethren: "Revered ones, cease to mourn. We are now happily released from the rule of the great Sramana; we shall no

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173 / more be tormented with 'this is allowable' and 'that is not allowable'; we can now do what we wish, and leave undone what we do not care for." To put an end to this scandal to religion, and to fix definitely the bonds of morality, the great disciple, Kathapa, called together, forty-five years after the Buddha's death, in the year 543 B.C., the first great Council, at Rajagriha, in the country of Magadha. Kathapa himself was president. The Wini was read by Upali; whom Shin Gautama himself had pointed out as the most learned of his followers, and the Dharma by Ananda, the personal attendant and favourite disciple of the Budh. During seven months the various points in dispute were considered from all points, and after rulings had been publicly and authoritatively given, the Council broke up. Thus were the three "baskets of the Law" first settled.

But the backsliders were not corrected, and they gradually increased in number, until, one hundred years later, it was found necessary to call together another synod. There was now a considerable body of schismatics, and they formulated a demand for definite relaxations from the severity of the laws. The Council was again held in the country of Magadha (the modern Oudh), this time in the town of Wethali. The king, Kalathawka, built a splendid hall, and when all was ready, himself placed the ivory fan on the ledge of the pulpit, and sent a message to the members of the Thengā who had assembled for the conference, saying, "Lords, my task is finished." The relaxations demanded were then discussed. The most important were as follows:— Food might be taken until the shade of the sun was two inches in length; whereas Shin Gautama had directed that for the curbing of the flesh none should be eaten after noontide.

Whey might be drunk after mid-day; forbidden as being a component part of milk, and therefore approaching animal food.

Tari, or palm toddy, might be taken, because it looks like water. This was a particularly bold demand, seeing that all fermented liquors are forbidden, and that in modern days the same plea might be urged on behalf of gin.

Gold and silver might be accepted as alms; the use of them being strictly prohibited.

A junior might lawfully copy a senior even in what is wrong; whereas no example could be any valid excuse for a wrong act.

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Subsequent permission might cover an act; whereas the Wini required prior permission.

The restrictions against indulgences were to be in force only in the monasteries; and not for those who might be sojourning in villages.

These points, after lengthy discussion, were all given against the dissenters, and degradation was awarded them as a punishment.

Still matters got worse, and in 241 B.C. the great king Athawka, of Pataliputra, brought about the third and last great Council to cleanse the Church. After nine months' public reading of the Book of Rules and of the most excellent Law, 60,000 heretics were expelled from the Church, and it was resolved to propagate the religion far and wide. This last decision was fraught with the most momentous consequences to Burma, for among the missionaries sent north, south, east, and west from Behar were the two, Thawna and Öttara, who proceeded to the country of Suvarna Bhumi, the "Golden Land," and landing at Thatôn, now north of Maulmein, but then on the sea-coast, proceeded to disseminate the Buddhist doctrines amongst the tribes in the great river-valleys of the country. It is important to notice that the doctrines they brought with them had just been revised and confirmed by a great Council of the Church. Since then, throughout all Burma, the old geniolatry has been displaced by the teachings of the Buddha. The regulations, introduced then in their first purity, have been retained ever since practically unchanged, so that at the present time Buddhism exists in Burma in a form much nearer to that which Shin Gautama taught than is found in any country where the Three Precious Things are held in reverence.

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The only sect which has at any time started any doctrinal heresy is that of the Paramats. They reject the worship before pagodas and images, and pray only to the Nyan-daw, the godlike wisdom, which abides like a mountain of fire in the heavens, invisible to mortal eyes, and taking no interest and exercising no influence over mundane things. These

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dissenters pay reverence to the ordinary brethren of the yellow robe, keep the Ten Precepts, repeat the Bawana (Payā, Tayā, Thengā, etc.) and the Ittipi-thaw, but they never go near the shrines, and recite their prayers and invocations in the jungle or in open fields. It is a kind of reminiscence of fire-worship, an ancestral adoration of the heavens in the sun, caused possibly by a shrinking from the suspicion of idolatry. A cardinal fault in them is that they give no alms, for most religions are at one on the question that charity covers a multitude of sins. The sect was founded at the beginning of this century by a pōngyi, called by his followers Shin Tabaung. He lived at Sinbyugyun, "White Elephant Island," a place half-way between Mandalay and the British frontier, and the dissent would probably never have spread beyond that district, or outlived the life of its originator, had it not been for the king Bodaw Payā. When the Thenga refused to recognise his claim to be the fifth Buddha of this world cycle, he espoused the cause of the Paramats, imposed penalties on all monks who would not accept their tenets, and went so far as to force a Thathanabaing, one of the heads of the Order, to marry, marriage being permissible under the doctrines of the dissenters. This gave the schism a prominence which it could not otherwise have attained, and enabled it to last down to the present time, though its numbers, never very great, have steadily dwindled away. There are perhaps more Paramats in Prome than in any other town of Burma, Lower or Upper. Their most prominent doctrine is that the Shwe Nyan-daw existed before the world began, and will exist for all eternity. Ideas may arise from the influence of exterior objects, but when they have been freed from their connection with bodily creations, they have an independent existence, and when once they have come into being continue to live. This is explained by the assertion that the quasi-deity of the Buddha is founded only on his supreme wisdom. Buddha means, etymologically, "the wise," and Shin Gautama was simply an incarnation of the pure Wisdom. Men believed they actually saw him when he was already really a deity—nothing else than the inspiring Nyan-daw, which made the five Khandas appear to have an

actual earthly existence. Occasionally an energetic Sadaw excommunicates all the Paramats under his jurisdiction, and forbids all the laity to sell to them, or have any communication whatever with them, but as a rule they are let alone. The movement is too feeble to threaten any real danger to religion, and has never gained many adherents among the laity.

It is a different matter with the rival parties of the Mahagandi and the Sulagandi. Here there are no heretical doctrines in dispute; it is simply a question of greater adherence to the strict rule of the Order. Instead of, as in the early days of the Assembly, one party crying out against the too great austerity of the majority, it is a sturdy protest of a minority within the Church against the lamentable weakness and laxity of the great body of the Order in the observance of the precepts of the Book of the Enfranchisement. The quarrel is at present limited to Lower Burma, where the greater wealth of the country and the introduction of foreign luxuries among the laity have led to corresponding indulgences in many of the monasteries, against which the Sulagandis protest and preach with feverish energy. The austere party is strongest in Maulmein, Henzada, and Pegu, and faction feeling runs so high that street fights between the scholars of the two sects are very common, and often so embittered that the English authorities have to interfere to restore peace in the town, for the laity take sides with equally bitter animosity.

The questions in dispute are entirely matters of discipline. The Puritan party, as the Sulagandi may very well be called, denounce the habit, which is becoming very frequent, of wearing silk robes. The Kammawā sets forth that the thengan should be stitched together of rags picked up in the streets or in the graveyards, and such panthagu thengans the Sulagandis wear and glory in. The Mahagandis, on the other hand, have been gradually becoming more and more luxurious. At first new cloth was torn into irregular pieces, and then sewn together. Latterly it has been considered sufficient to tear a corner and stitch it up again, or perhaps only to rip a portion of a seam, and from this to the wearing of silk garments was no very great step.

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The Puritan party declare that this is simply a scandalous playing with the letter of the law. Again, the Sulagandis eat out of the alms-bowl as it comes in from the morning round, whereas the Mahagandis empty out the thabeit into plates and make as palatable a meal as possible from their collections, which, on the face of it, is a pandering to fleshly weakness. Others, much more bold in their backsliding, do not hesitate to have a special meal cooked for them every morning by the Kyaung-tha-gyi, and sit down to it smoking hot, after their morning's perambulation, while the begging-bowl is handed over to poor people staying in the monastery, or emptied out for the benefit of the dogs and crows. No sophistry, one would think, could explain away this Sybaritism, but the Mahagandis have the assurance to try to make a merit of it, saying that the money expended by the Kappiya-dayaka on the materials for the breakfast is the proceeds of the sale of previous offerings of the pious—rugs, blankets, lamps, and so on—and by thus making use of it, not only do the people gain merit for their gifts of food, but the monks themselves are enabled to extend their charity to the poor or the birds of the air. That is a severe straining of the command that the Ariya should live by alms.

Similarly when the Mahagandi goes abroad he wears sandals on his feet, and protects his shaven crown from the rays of the sun with an umbrella. The austere brother walks the streets barefooted and bareheaded; even though his head may ache and his feet be blistered with the shimmering heat of high noon. Only when he is on a long journey does the Sulagandi allow himself such superfluities as sandals or umbrella. The Mahagandi will receive coin in his own hands, covered by a handkerchief; the Sulagandi will not take it even through the instrumentality of a pupil, or off a ngwe-pa-detha, a rupee-hung tree, at Tawadeintha feast time. Pwès on feast days, or even in the neighbourhood of the pagodas, are denounced by the reforming party; so are balloons with fireworks in them; the habit many monks have fallen into of going to visit Englishmen, with no other object than curiosity; and above all the noisy saturnalia in the monasteries at the end of Lent which

have become so common in Rangoon. It will thus be seen that the great point at issue is the maintenance of the original humble character of the brotherhood. The different vernacular presses of Rangoon flood the country with controversial tracts written by both parties, and the laity adopt sides and carry polemical discussions into private life. So fierce had the quarrel become, that in 1880 one of the most learned and venerated of the Mandalay heads of the Church, the Thinkazā Sadaw, came down to settle the question. He was received everywhere with extraordinary honours. At Danubyu the whole of the populace lined the path up to the monastery prepared for him, and kneeling down, threw their hair across the way, so that from the river-bank to the steps of the kyaung he walked all the way on a carpet of human tresses. But he did not settle which party was in the right. After making abundant inquiries and hearing the most prominent advocates on either side, he halted at Henzada and announced that he was about to give his decision. Unfortunately it came to his ears that in that town, as well as in several others, the Ariya had been betting freely as to which way he would give his judgment. Thereupon the Sadaw grew furious, denounced both parties alike, and refused to say anything which would countenance the claims of either sect. He remained for a considerable time in the low country, giving numerous addresses for the building up of religion, but never on any occasion throwing out a hint as to which way he leaned, further than that both parties should give way a little and refrain from exhibiting such scandalous dissensions before the heretics. The warfare was calmed for a space, but the old fierce denunciations have broken out again. The opposing abbots bid their lay supporters refrain from giving alms to the rival sect. They recommend all the penalties of excommunication without having the power to go through the formal ceremony. But though the Mahagandis have the greater number of followers, the self-denying Sulagandis have all the more earnest and rightly-thinking men on their side and will probably prevail in the end, though a new great synod may have to be held before that is effected. The head of the reforming party is U Ōkgansa, a learned Sadaw, whose monastery is at Ōkpo

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785 in the Tharrawadi district. He was at one time invited to go up to Mandalay to assume the control of a Kyaung and spend the rest of his days there. The Burmese Government offered to send down a royal steamer with high dignitaries to escort him to the capital, but the sturdy old "Bishop" refused to forsake his party until he should be persuaded that its principles would gain the victory in the end. And so no doubt they will, for not even the most casual observer can fail to see that they, in their bare ascetic monasteries, are far nearer to the ideal of the founder than the Mahagandis with all the appliances of their richly-stocked abiding-places.

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The whole notion is of course foreign to Buddhism, and is viewed with great disfavour by the members of the sacred assembly, but they are no more able to put a stop to it than they are to suppress nat-worship in the subsidiary form in which it still exists. It is somewhat discouraging to those who have the welfare of the people at heart; yet still when one comes to highly civilised countries such as are found in Europe and finds ghosts only a little less demonstratively believed in, a load is removed. The world is very small after all.

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The leip-bya idea, like a good many other peculiarities of the Burmese, occasionally gets them into trouble with foreigners. It is the cause of the great unwillingness all Burmans have to wake a sleeping man. It is obvious from the above explanation of the character of the leip-bya, that it would be highly injurious to rouse a man suddenly from his slumbers. His butterfly might be wandering far from the body, and probably would not have time to hurry back to its tenement. Then the man would certainly fall sick, or at any rate would be indisposed for a time. Consequently, it is useless to tell a Burman servant to wake you at a certain hour. He will come in at the appointed time and look wistfully at you, and wish something would fall down and make a noise; but he himself will tread as softly as a housebreaker, and will not even have the heart to instigate somebody outside to make a disturbance. The Englishman has not got "humanity," it is true; he has not been in a monastery, and is therefore not really a "man"; but there is no knowing but what he might have a leip-bya for all that. Consequently the master is not wakened, and gets up an hour and a half after he wanted to, and storms at the poor Burman for a lazy scoundrel who snores away till the sun is as high in the sky as the pagoda spire, let alone a tari palm.

The same thing occurs out in the country villages. An English assistant commissioner rides unexpectedly into a small townlet in his subdivision and calls for the headman. That worthy is having his afternoon siesta, and the good wife announces this with a composure which almost surprises the young sub-janta wallah into swearing. He says, "Well, then, wake him, and tell him to bring his accounts along to the traveller's bungalow." Old Ma Gyi shudders

and tanks, and cases of sporadic cholera are the consequence. So says the civil surgeon; but the Burmans do not believe him. They are convinced that a nat-so, some evil spirit, has taken up his abode in the place, and is exacting revenge for some real or fancied insult. They accordingly take this means of forcing him to quit; and if the malignant nat can be supposed to have any nerves whatever, it certainly ought to be effective.

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The brethren of the monastery discountenance the practice as far as they can—as indeed every one not afflicted with a dulness of hearing might be expected to do. It is a remnant of the old geniolatry, and, having nothing to do with pure Buddhism, confounds the dewas of the six heavens with the heathenish spirits of the old wild tribes. But cholera is a pestilence that regards not the yellow robe of the mendicant any more than the gay paso of the frivolous; and so the pôngyis hold the ceremony which immediately precedes the wild riot called thayè tópthi, and display their opposition no more violently than by getting out of the way as fast as the dignified walk prescribed to the Assembly of the Perfect permits.

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It is related that long ago, at the time of the beginning of religion, the terrible pestilence swept over Kapilawut, the city of Thudawdana, the father of the Lord Buddha. Only at the intercession and by the merits of the prayers and good works of the saviour of the world and his assembly, was the plague stayed, and the city saved from desolation—hence the function called pareit yóththi. Cholera has broken out in the village. Several deaths have occurred in succession with the terrible suddenness which is characteristic of the disease. The dirges played by the bands for the dead fade into one another and break out all down the street. Then one of the chief men of the place makes preparations and begs the monks to come down from the monastery. A raised dais is put up at the back of the room for the accommodation of the yahans, and covered with mats. Offerings to the holy men are arranged in a long row before the platform—rice, fruit, flowers, betel-boxes, pillows, cups and bowls. Alongside of these are placed the vessels which the monastic superior is to consecrate—nyaung ye-o, sacred to the use of

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of some substance, which those who found it called a-yet hke (congealed or solidified spirit), on the analogy of ye hke (ice). How they came to try it I do not know; but after a while it was found out that this was the grand secret. A small fragment of this stuff proved thoroughly effectual in converting the baser metals into gold. No matter what it was tried on—tin, copper, lead, iron—the result was always satisfactory, and the discoverers travelled about the country for a time turning other people's scraps of metal into gold. Then the supply of the a-yet hke ran out; and the great question is now where to get more of it. The invention of compressed beer created hope; but the acquisition of that article was disillusionising. It had not the magical properties of the a-yet khè, and it was not good to drink. There is here, perhaps, a promising field for sympathetic Western industry. It may be hoped that the wrecking of the ship had nothing to do with communicating its special virtue to the compressed spirit; otherwise we might have an alarming series of maritime disasters all round the Gulf of Martaban. Burning houses to get roast pig would be a trifle to this.

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These are a few of the methods adopted, and they may be taken as samples of them all. None of them are more scientific, and the three I have described enjoy the reputation of being entirely successful in the right hands. But the practice is much discountenanced by the pious. Alchemy is specially denounced by the Lord Buddha. It tends to induce covetousness; and the striving is in itself the best evidence of a love for the things of this world, which incapacitate a man for the contemplative states of zān and arupa—how much more, then, for ne'ban. The monks, the Assembly of the Perfect, of course denounce it; for, in addition to the consulting of horoscopes—itsself, though universal (the pōngyi himself had one drawn up when he was a week old), a Brahminical practice, and remote from true Buddhism—there are numerous other observances connected with alchemy which are still more heretical. In addition to consulting his sādī for a lucky hour, the alchemist frequently also obtains omens through the augurs from the bones of a sacrificial ~~cow~~. It is arranged that the thigh bones of a chicken shall

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6 THE SOUL OF A PEOPLE CH.

776 delight of her life ; and it would seem to me that
779 she must believe in a God and in prayer after all.
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771 So though I found much in these books that
779 was believed by the people, and much that was
182 to them the guiding influence of their lives, yet I
was unable to trust to them altogether, and I was
in doubt where to seek for the real beliefs of these
people. If I went to their monks, their holy men,
the followers of the great teacher, Gaudama, they
referred me to their books as containing all that
a Buddhist believed ; and when I pointed out the
discrepancies, they only shook their heads, and said
that the people were an ignorant people and con-
fused their beliefs in that way.

779 When I asked what was a Buddhist, I was told
● 795 that, to be a Buddhist, a man must be accepted into
182 the religion with certain rites, certain ceremonies, he
must become for a time a member of the community
of the monks of the Buddha, and that a Buddhist
was he who was so accepted, and who thereafter
held by the teachings of the Buddha.

But when I searched the life of the Buddha, I
could not find any such ceremonies necessary at all.
So that it seemed that the religion of the Buddha
was one religion, and the religion of the Buddhists
another ; but when I said so to the monks, they
were horror-struck, and said that it was because I
did not understand.

114 In my perplexity I fell back, as we all must, to
182 my own thoughts and those of my own people ; and
779 I tried to imagine how a Burman would act if he
101 came to England to search into the religion of the
English and to know the impulses of our lives.

54 THE SOUL OF A PEOPLE CH.

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—in fact, that beyond collecting a certain amount of taxes, and appointing governors to the different provinces, it hardly made itself felt outside Mandalay and the large river towns. The people to a great extent governed themselves. They had a very good system of village government, and managed nearly all their local affairs. But beyond the presence of a governor, there was but little to attach them to the central government. There was, and is, absolutely no aristocracy of any kind at all. The Burmese are a community of equals, in a sense that has probably never been known elsewhere. All their institutions are the very opposite to feudalism. Now, feudalism was instituted to be useful in war. The Burmese customs were instituted that men should live in comfort and ease during peace; they were useless in war. So the natural leaders of a people, as in other countries, were absent. There were no local great men; the governors were men appointed from time to time from Mandalay, and usually knew nothing of their charges; there were no rich men, no large landholders—not one. There still remained, however, one institution that other nations have made useful in war, namely, the organization of religion. For Buddhism is fairly well organized—certainly much better than ever the government was. It has its heads of monasteries, its Gaing-dauks, its Gaing-oks, and finally the Thathanabaing, the head of the Burmese Buddhism. The overthrow of King Thibaw had not injured any of this. This was an organization in touch with the whole people, revered and honoured by every man and woman and child in the country. In this

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terrible scene of anarchy and confusion, in this death peril of their nation, what were the monks doing?

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We know what religion can do. We have seen how it can preach war and resistance, and can organize that war and resistance. We know what ten thousand priests preaching in ten thousand hamlets can effect in making a people almost unconquerable, in directing their armies, in strengthening their determination. We remember La Vendée, we remember our Puritans, and we have had recent experience in the Soudan. We know what Christianity has done again and again; what Judaism, what Mahommedanism, what many kinds of paganism, have done.

To those coming to Burma in those days, fresh from the teachings of Europe, remembering recent events in history, ignorant of what Buddhism means, there was nothing more surprising than the fact that in this war religion had no place. They rode about and saw the country full of monasteries; they saw the monasteries full of monks, whom they called priests; they saw that the people were intensely attached to their religion; they had daily evidence that Buddhism was an abiding faith in the hearts of the people. And yet, for all the assistance it was to them in the war, the Burmese might have had no faith at all.

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The explanation is, that the teachings of the Buddha forbid war. All killing is wrong, all war is hateful; nothing is more terrible than this destroying of your fellow-man. There is absolutely no getting free of this commandment. The teaching of the Buddha is that you must strive to make your

56 THE SOUL OF A PEOPLE CH.

own soul perfect. This is the first of all things, and comes before any other consideration. Of the virtues that only war can create and nourish this teaching knows nothing. Be pure and kind-hearted, full of charity and compassion, and so you may do good to others. These are the vows the Buddhist monks make, these are the vows they keep; and so it happened that all that great organization was useless to the patriot fighter, was worse than useless, for it was against him. The whole spectacle of Burma in those days, with the country seething with strife, and the monks going about their business calmly as ever, begging their bread from door to door, preaching of peace, not war, of kindness, not hatred, of pity, not revenge, was to most foreigners quite inexplicable. They could not understand it. I remember a friend of mine with whom I went through many experiences speaking of it with scorn. He was a cavalry officer, 'the model of a light cavalry officer'; he had with him a squadron of his regiment, and we were trying to subdue a very troubled part of the country.

We were camping in a monastery, as we frequently did—a monastery on a hill near a high golden pagoda. The country all round was under the sway of a brigand leader, and sorely the villagers suffered at his hands now that he had leapt into unexpected power. The villages were half abandoned, the fields untilled, the people full of unrest; but the monasteries were as full of monks as ever; the gongs rang, as they ever did, their message through the quiet evening air; the little boys were taught there just the same; the trees were watered and the gardens swept as if there were no change

84 THE SOUL OF A PEOPLE CH.

000 people themselves—a hundred years behind them in civilization, a thousand years behind them in morality. Men will do in the name of government acts which, if performed in a private capacity, would cover them with shame before men, and would land them in a gaol or worse. The name of government is a cloak for the worst passions of manhood. It is not an interesting study, the government of mankind.

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719 A government is no part of the soul of the people, but is a mere excrescence; and so I have but little to say about this of Burma, beyond this curious fact—that religion had no part in it. Surely this is a very remarkable thing, that a religion having the hold upon its followers that Buddhism has upon the Burmese has never attempted to grasp the supreme authority and use it to its ends.

It is not quite an explanation to say that Buddhism is not concerned with such things; that its very spirit is against the assumption of any worldly power and authority; that it is a negation of the value of these things. Something of this sort might be said of other religions, and yet they have all striven to use the temporal power.

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795 I do not know what the explanation is unless it be that the Burmese believe their religion and other people do not. However that may be, there is no doubt of the fact. Religion had nothing whatever—absolutely nothing in any way at all—to do with government. There are no exceptions. What has led people to think sometimes that there were exceptions is the fact that the king confirmed the That-hanzJaing—the head of the community of monks—

after he had been elected by his fellow-monks. The reason of this was as follows: All ecclesiastical matters—I use the word ‘ecclesiastical’ because I can find no other—were outside the jurisdiction of civil limits. By ‘ecclesiastical’ I mean such matters as referred to the ownership and habitation of monasteries, the building of pagodas and places of prayer, the discipline of the monkhood. Such questions were decided by ecclesiastical courts under the Thathanabaing.

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Now, it was necessary sometimes, as may be understood, to enforce these decrees, and for that reason to apply to civil power. Therefore there must be a head of the monks acknowledged by the civil power as head, to make such applications as might be necessary in this, and perhaps some other such circumstances.

It became, therefore, the custom for the king to acknowledge by order the elect of the monks as Thathanabaing for all such purposes. That was all. The king did not appoint him at all.

Any such idea as a monk interfering in the affairs of state, or expressing an opinion on war or law or finance, would appear to the Burmese a negation of their faith. They were never led away by the idea that good might come of such interference. This terrible snare has never caught their feet. They hold that a man's first duty is to his own soul. Never think that you can do good to others at the same time as you injure yourself, and the greatest good for your own heart is to learn that beyond all this turmoil and fret there is the Great Peace—so great that we can hardly understand it, and to reach

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18 So the worship of the ^{BURMESE DRAMA} ~~gods~~ lived on, and with the advance of civilization the spirit dances became elaborate, for though the belief was primitive, the people were no longer so. The dances benefited from the developments that had taken place in Burmese music which, as we have seen, flourished under the patronage of the Pagan kings. New spirits were added, and they were usually those of heroic princes. The dancers were now many, for the mediums turned themselves into dancing and music mistresses. The chief medium of each spirit dressed herself in the special dress of the spirit, but the junior mediums, who were equivalent to the chorus of an English revue, were in the dress of Burmese princesses. It is interesting to note the origin of this dress. The mediums realized the necessity of dressing themselves in fine raiment, but as everybody wore clothes of bright colours, the only solution of the problem was to don the dress of the court and official class, which the commoners were forbidden to wear by law, except during feasts and dances. When drama proper came into being, the hero and the heroine dressed themselves in the court dress, even when they were representing common characters.

3. MIRACLES AND INTERLUDES

After the fall of the kingdom of Pagan in A.D. 1257, Burma was the scene of fierce civil wars, but the trouble was mainly in the capitals; in the villages and small towns life went on in its joyous way. Religion continued to spread in spite of the fact that the throne of Pagan was no longer in existence to support it. Learning began to reach the remotest parts of the country, carried far and near by monks. To escape from the aimless strife of the civil wars, men turned towards literature. Money was lacking to compose poems in brick as had been done at Pagan, and men now expressed their love for the religion and their love for the beautiful in writing. The new literature further educated the people and made even stronger the already strong religious fervour. As a result, at village feasts and on days of public rejoicing, the people turned towards their religion for amusement and entertainment. So pageants depicting scenes from the life of the Buddha and from his Birth Stories came into being.

Pageants were given on ordinary carts that were in use for all kinds of transport and which are still in use in backward parts of the country at the present day. Each cart carried a group of (amateur) actors standing still and representing a set scene. Originally, no doubt, there were only a few carts representing scenes from different stories. Later, a pageant came to consist of many carts and many

178 witnessed Burmese plays.¹ Ridgeway approves of that theory. He
 536 maintains that the tree is symbolic of the worship of the *nat*. In an
 114 appendix to the book he quotes a letter from a resident in Burma
 (which arrived too late to be discussed in the book itself), describing
 [76] some sort of a *nat* ritual where a spirit was supposed to be dwelling in a
 [76] tree. However, *nats* are supposed to dwell, not only in trees, but also
 in houses, mountains, streams, lakes, on Mount Mayyu, in fact every-
 where, and it is extremely unlikely that the tree should have been chosen
 specially to represent the abode of the *nat*. In all the ritual connected
 with the worship of the thirty-seven *nats*, the use of a tree does not occur
 except in the case of the *nat*, U-Yin-Gyi. When offerings are made
 to him, a wooden representation of a forked branch of a tree is used.
 But that symbol is used only when that particular spirit alone is
 being worshipped, i.e. when all the *nats* are being worshipped as *Mac*
 the symbol is not used. U-Yin-Gyi has no special connexion with
 the stage, and he is essentially connected with Lower Burma; and
 Upper Burma, not Lower, was the home of Burmese drama. And
 what Colonel Yule took to be a vague answer was the true answer.
 What he saw was an interlude and not a developed play, and, as has
 been stated, the scene of the interlude was almost always the forest,
 for it needed nothing except a tree to indicate the scene. Therefore,
 the tree which the ambassador saw was a piece of stage scenery and
 nothing more.

536 Though Ridgeway's theory that the drama had its origins in the
 795 worship of the *nats*, therefore, is not founded on fact, his contention
 that the Burmese professional actors are the literal descendants of the
 mediums who impersonated the spirits of the dead is not wrong.
 But the fact that the actors are the descendants of such persons should
 not mislead us into thinking the drama to be a descendant of spirit
 worship. There is a great danger of being thus misled if one knows
 the various stage conventions without knowing the real history of the
 drama. And had Ridgeway been acquainted with these conven-
 tions, which (strangely enough) were not known to him and his
 informants, he might have been strengthened in his view. The
 most important of the stage conventions is the *nat* chorus which
 often acts as a 'curtain-raiser' to the actual play. The chorus
 composed of females comes out and sings and dances to various *nat*

¹ H. Yule, *A Narrative of the Mission sent by the Governor-General of India to the Court of Ava in 1833*.

THE ORIGINS OF BURMESE DRAMA

29

tunes played by the orchestra. The chorus was first introduced for two reasons: the audience liked a dance, and the actors did not forget that their original calling was that of mediums.

2. According to Ridgeway, the second stage of the drama was reached when the 'true dramatic element borrowed from the Indian historical plays of Rama, presented by the puppet players' had entered Burmese drama. The weak points in this theory will be apparent when the further history of the drama is considered in later chapters. The 'true dramatic element' was already in the *Nikkathkin*, or at least in the interlude; the Indian *Ramayana* coming by way of Siam did influence Burmese drama, but this was possible only because there was already a native drama to absorb this foreign influence. Nor were the *Rama* plays presented at first by puppet players. When the translations and adaptations of the Siamese *Ramayana* were being first presented at court, puppet plays were unknown. Ridgeway puts forward some opinions regarding the Burmese puppet show also, but they will be considered in Chapter VII.

3. According to Ridgeway, the third stage of Burmese drama was reached when there appeared plays 'based on the Indian models, but finding their themes in the national history and mythology, intermixed with Buddhistic elements, and performed by puppets and living actors.' It is true that after the introduction of the Siamese *Rama* play to the Burmese court, plays of the type described appeared, but the plays were by no means modelled on the *Rama* play. The Siamese play gave rise to a native court drama which influenced the interlude and prepared the way for the first great Burmese dramatist, U Kyin U. And the 'Buddhistic elements' which entered the drama have a history of their own. All these points are considered in later chapters.

On the nature and achievements of Burmese drama, Ridgeway says: 'The Burmese drama has not remained crystallized as a piece of religious ritual. On the contrary, it has made distinct steps towards the true drama which Thepis in Greece and the forerunners of Marlowe and Shakespeare in England detached from the sacred shrines and lifted into a distinct artistic form. Yet it has not advanced beyond the lyrical stage, consisting of dancing, singing and instruments of music, the undulation of the vocal expression being much more subtle and intense than the expression of features, whilst gesture is restricted to the conventional gestures of the dance. The usual scene is the palace, its inmates the characters, and the drama

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536* part, although there was no stage convention preventing women from
 534 taking it up as a vocation. The head of the orchestra was also the
 462 head of the troupe. He was the most learned and experienced
 463 member, and he was responsible for the organization and financial
 outlay, paying more or less fixed wages to the others, and taking the
 profits himself. When engaged for a performance, the troupe was
 paid by public subscription or by some philanthropic person, usually
 an official, and therefore no charge for admission was made, all being
 [565] welcome to it. The Burmese actors as a class, unlike their Elizabethan
 counterparts who could endow a College of God's Gift or buy a
 coat-of-arms, were poor. But they never starved, for even the poorest
 villages would welcome and feed them on their wanderings all over
 the country. The troupe was one large family, and the children of the
 members accompanied it. In spite of the prejudice against them
 and their poverty, the actors loved their art, and enjoyed the perfor-
 mances themselves.

536* There were many conventions connected with the stage, and they
 can be divided into two classes: those imposed on the actors by
 themselves, and those imposed by the fear of becoming unpopular
 with the audience.

795 The actors never forgot that they were originally spirit-dancers,
 536* and therefore they had conventions by which they showed their
 indebtedness to spirit worship. Before the performance offerings of
 food were made to the thirty-seven *nats*. As a curtain-raiser, there
 was a performance by a dancer or chorus of dancers. Each wore a red
 cloth round the head—the sign of a spirit worshipper. Singing
 [533] invocations to the *nats* and dancing the appropriate dances, they asked
 for protection by the spirits, while the orchestra played a bar from each
 of the thirty-seven *nat* tunes. It was supposed that if this convention
 [751] was broken, disaster would befall the troupe, the performance would
 prove a failure, and the actors would become mad; but often these
 conventions had been known to be broken, accidentally or otherwise.

536* The actors were looked upon as irreligious and immoral, and on
 463 the slightest excuse, they were in danger of being considered profane.
 554 Therefore, as has been stated, they took over the conventions from
 [719] the *Nibbattihin*. The Buddha was never impersonated, and an *arahat*
 or saint only when absolutely necessary, and then by an able and
 'serious' actor, who had to keep a fast that day. Not even a mild
 joke was to be made against the Buddha or an *arahat*, although even
 monks and the religion itself could be the butt of a clown's wit. But

INTRODUCTION

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What is of further importance for our present inquiry is the fact that the tradition thus established throughout Burma was the Hinayāna tradition, not the Mahāyāna.²⁰ It will therefore be the more significant if we find in Burmese Buddhism a positive conception of Nirvana, for, in the past, scholars have frequently associated a negative conception with the Hinayāna tradition, enlarging the distance between the two schools: Nirvana might spell paradise in China or Japan, it was argued, but for Southern Buddhists it was the Void.

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There were, it is true, outposts of the Mahāyāna faith in Burma, notably at Pagan, where Mahāyāna cults survived for perhaps two centuries after A-naw-ra-ha's conversion, tolerated by the now dominating Hinayāna tradition which absorbed some elements of the sister faith.²¹ There is also evidence, not only of Mahāyāna rivalry, but also of Brahmanical Hinduism (as at Pagan) in Southern Burma in the earlier centuries.²²

A first glance at the map may occasion surprise that Mahāyāna influence on Burmese Buddhism was not more considerable, for China, where the Mahāyāna tradition thrived for several centuries, is just across the north east border and the Burmese themselves are a Mongolian race. A second glance, however, discovers the far distances between centres of influence. There is a sweeping borderland of mountain ranges and remote valleys, and, in the earlier centuries, the buffer state of Nanchao lay in between China and the Burmese kingdoms. The sea route from India was the easier route to Southern Burma and Indian traders and adventurers were the forerunners of Indian missionaries.

When all qualifications have been made, we must conclude that the formative tradition of Buddhism in Burma was the Hinayāna, introduced from India and nourished from Ceylon. And from the eleventh century onwards, "the stronger vitality of the Southern school completely absorbed, assimilated and obliterated the Northern school."²³

The royal encouragement given by A-naw-ra-ha was frequently echoed by later rulers. Burmese kings were styled 'great Captains of the Law,' and as late as the nineteenth century good King Mindon convened the 'Fifth Buddhist Council' at Mandalay, when the scriptures were engraved on over seven hundred tablets of marble.

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²⁰ The term, Hinayāna, is sometimes regarded as disparaging. 'Southern' or 'Theravāda' Buddhism might be preferred in this connection, but it is probably less confusing to use the terms now familiar in the West.

²¹ Ray, *Sanskrit Buddhism in Burma*, p. 93, and *Theravāda Buddhism in Burma*, pp. 150ff.

²² Ray, *Theravāda Buddhism in Burma*, pp. 86, 87; cf. Taw Sein Kho, *Census Report (Burma, 1901)*, p. 32.

²³ Taw Sein Kho, *ibid.*, p. 32.

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But Burmese kings were not always good. The monasteries which became centres of community life in village after village have to be pictured more often against a dark background of marauding armies, political feud and violent revolt. This chequered history gives point to the suggestion that Burma owes its civilisation and 'the preservation of ... moral and mental balance' very largely to the Buddhist Order which persisted and grew apace through all vicissitudes.²³ Within the Order, there was a remarkable degree of discipline, upheld by a *Thāthanābaing* or Burmese Arch-Abbot. There was also a remarkable unanimity. Although there were different schools and parties, it is significant that there is little, if any, hint of doctrinal controversy. If there had been any considerable impact of Mahāyāna interpretation, we should surely have heard more about it. What, on the contrary, is much more evident, is the continued impact of Ceylon. Perhaps the most serious division was occasioned by a claim that it was necessary to resort to Ceylon to maintain the legitimate 'line of descent.' There were, it is true, schismatics. Non-conformist Paramata sects decried the Order and taught the existence of an immanent Divine Being, the *Shwe Nyan Daw*, a belief which may reflect either Mahāyāna or Hindu influence. By and large, however the dominating religious and cultural force was Hinayāna Buddhism for eight centuries without interruption. We have therefore good reason for beginning a study of Southern Buddhism in a country which has been so deeply impressed by its influence.

There is also a personal reason. It was in Burma, some twenty years ago, that my own acquaintance with Buddhism began. It was during discussions with monks and laymen there that I began to think that Nirvana was the ultimate religious term of their faith — the term which symbolised the consummation of their doctrine, practice and aspiration. And the mode of expression of this Nirvana symbol seemed to me significant, not only for my Buddhist friends, but for all concerned with the study of religion and life.

²³ J. A. Stewart, "Note on Some Authorities for the History of Burma," *J.B.R.S.*, XIII (1923), p. 75.

²⁴ M. H. Bode, *Pali Literature of Burma*, chap. II, p. 19.

779* he had made, how much more had to be done, before he could hope for
 775* that ultimate vision of "things hard to understand, tranquilising, sweet,
 not to be grasped by mere logic."²⁸ Because he had not yet attained,
 Nibbāna was still a Mystery. But because he had attained thus far, he
 knew that it must be a Mystery. Nevertheless it was his goal, his Ziel,
 inspiring all his present purpose.

"Nibbāna," repeated the Sayādaw, "is not annihilation. Not that.
 It is ----"

He paused.

"How can I say?"

5. A Dialogue on Nibbāna

It is interesting to compare the Sayādaw's attitude in this interview, with the more speculative attitude illustrated by the Burmese scholar Shwe Zan Aung, in his *Dialogue on Nibbāna*.²⁹ In this Dialogue the nihilistic view that Nibbāna is "pure nothing" is mentioned briefly in the Dialogue, then dismissed. No doubt it existed in the past. This much is suggested, it is remarked, by the fact that every recent writer has gone out of his way to insist that Nibbāna is 'something.' But the view that Nibbāna is annihilation is said to have been exploded by Buddhist writers generally from the twelfth century onwards.

"We are all agreed that Nibbāna is something" remarks Tissa in the Dialogue, "though we differ as to the nature of that."

• [795] "The Burmese Buddhist world of philosophy," it is further explained, "is divided into three camps, so to speak. There is the Shwegyin school which holds that Nibbāna is spiritual mind, while the Okpo school advances the view that it is unique mind and body. The Ledi school, however, teaches that it is neither mind nor body but purely calm." This third view, says one of the characters in the Dialogue, the view that Nibbāna is nothing but calm, tranquility or peace, has been accepted throughout the length and breadth of Burma.

In the Dialogue, this popular third view is more or less assumed as the background. It is represented in the questions and dissents of Sumana, 'a pupil of Dr. Ledi,' who visits a venerable exponent of the Shwegyin school, U Agga, to ascertain his interpretation. The exposition of the

²⁸ D. i. 17H. (*Dialogues of the Buddha*, Part 1, pp. 30H.).

²⁹ J.B.R.S. Vol. VIII, Part III, 1918. Deeply versed himself in Abhidhamma studies, translator of texts for the Pali Text Society, pupil of one of Burma's most learned bhikkus, Shwe Zan Aung had both special opportunity and special qualifications for the estimate he essayed in this Dialogue.